



Sefer

Literary Magazine 2014



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Sefer

Literary Magazine

2014

Editors

Sarrah Strickland

Monique Gaboriau

Staff

Evan Berg-Bierman

Erica McCrea

Emily Moore

Victoria Murray

Ariel Ruff

Faculty Advisors

Dr. Celeste McMaster

Professor Jeremy Jones

The *Sefer* is written, edited, and produced
by students of Charleston Southern University.

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The word *sefer* translates from Hebrew as “work of writing” or “book”.

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Congratulations to this year's
cover art contest winner, Charles Alkire.
His piece is titled "Dragonfly."

Poetry



“Peace”

by Jessica Nkwocha

It's All Been Done Before

by Logan Crowder

“But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.”

—Book of Ecclesiastes, 12:12

There is a Machine, deep underwater
where every book is kept.

No one knows and no one goes
to that abyss of whirring gears,
always turning, always churning
the words thrown in the salty sea.

A fathomed forest sunken sways
as silver leaves fall into words:
“It’s all been done before.”

“Two roads’ divergence in a wasted land,
a Magician’s gift or God’s Right Hand,
don’t even try to understand,”
the Crow of Creativity cries, that miserly
keeper of the Machine, his glasses too small
for his scowling beak. He’s read it all,
and to smiths of words he caws:
“It’s all been done before.”

“Ancient mariners, men of old,
every story that’s ever been told
through man-made towers of man-made words,”
sings the briny wind through the door,
“It’s all been done before.”

No point in opening the Machine’s great door,
no shadows cast upon the floor

from torches lit by those before.
One word is heard: “nevermore,”
For it’s all been done before.
According to that ancient Machine,
deep below the deepest of seas:
“Even a poet complaining that
it’s all been done before. . .
. . .has been done before.”

But there is a sliver of hope to be found
between the cogs of the great Machine:
We writers are divers in a sea of words,
lifting our quills in defiance of ages,
blazing trails of ink across white pages,
our little bricks building our little towers.

Silly Little Dreams

by Logan Crowder

I saw my silly little dreams
stripped away like flesh from bone,
revealing pulsing veiny tissue
stung by the air it needs to live.

My heart-shaped box beats in time
with the beep of the laundry,
beginning the next sleep cycle:
a fresh clean batch of dreams.

The powdery taste of ecstasy
caked in my teeth as the high
of my musical MDMA fades away,
and my silly little dreams are left
to shrivel in the sun.

I'm left alone on the cold tile floor
with no one to talk to anymore
about my silly little dreams
and why God hands them out like candy
to diabetic automatons.



“Sea Turtle”
by Charles Alskire

Ink

by Autumn Hanna

Shiny blacks and blues are proper. Bruises. Formality.

Allow me to pull out your chair.

Glittering pink and purples for play. Balanchine. Swans.

I can't find my ballet slippers.

Green. I don't like it much. Green like the

color of

that

old, worn blanket my father favored.

The cotton

had bunched up in it

making it lumpy.

Green will always be

lumpy.

Red for mistakes. Prim. Precise.

This is wrong!

Do not hold your pen in that manner!

Why don't you just leave?!

Sanguine. Crimson. A river pouring from mauled flesh.

Teeth that bite. They sink deep.

Red hurts.

White is secretive. Blank, but not. Filled to the brim, but not yet.

White like bones.

Bones multiply when crushed.

It's that padded room where the voices can't find me—

Shhh!

White is... silence.

Gray-grey-Tolkien. Vox populi. A portrait upon which its owner
must never look.

To define is to limit.

Those grim clouds outside foretell rain.

Graphite smears. I hate pencils.

There is never enough ink to say what needs to be said. Upon a page of a given size and length filled with ink, scrawled in the style that the wielder of the pen prefers.

But at the end, when the last line looms—

*Haha! Looms like the Moirai!
Fate converges and nothing is left!*

Atropos be swift.

There is a time for many words, and there is also a time for sleep.

Where Hypnos treads, Thanatos soon follows.

—we look back over our chromatic manuscript and see colors.

Or nothing.

The words of the last line are rushed, crammed. Not space enough.

Yet we seek to make it count. To impart some profound cliché, some ancient wisdom that will fade with time—

Fade like ink...

The Mirror Pool

by Jeanie Herold

what lies above,
lies beneath,
in the mirror pool,
where reflections run deep,
so much so
that when perfectly still
the mind can't decide
which image is real.
we are made of water,
some say from the sea,
we are made in God's image,
to those who believe.
wouldn't we be fools,
if it turns out
we are just molecules in a pool?
that learned to be still...
simply images of what's Real.

The Whole World Stops

by Binh Tran

To love the smell of lilacs.

How she destroys me with loving endure,
How she creates me with hateful impatience,
With words of honey and underlying hate.

Yet, crossing endless oceans,
She says, "My little breeze of life, don't you wake"

The scent of her makes the clouds and waves stop,

The sight of her is to taste an orchestra,

All who see her is now a sleeping breath,

King Solomon sleeps now in Holy Israel,

We sleep in still soft grass,

For when we wake, we shall change,

Tasting Freedom

One more time,

We shall always say,

"How,

How I miss laying my head upon your lap."

We look to her face.

"The World never waits for us," she gently says,

Snow trails down our back,

As if our spines have snapped.

We shall reply, "But with you, the whole World stops."

She asks us in the midst of silent fall, "What am I to you?"

As if there were enmity between her voice and nonexistence itself.

Before we even respond,

She fades back into eternity,

And leaves us to our restless sanity.

Afterwards, we find our thoughts,

Without her,

We say,

“You are God-given.”
Because of her,
We know these words,
“I may retreat,
But I will always return,
And slowly I will be remade,”
Two withering lilacs wait.

At the Top

by Victoria Miller

Climb the stairs, you'll find me at the top
with pen and music trying to write a spell,
trying to write a poem in a coffee shop.

Wait, pay attention to which details I'll drop—
two hints: an April Smith album and a villanelle.
Climb the stairs, you'll find me at the top.

Trying to find rhymes that end with a *pop*,
some movement to match a singer's vocal swells,
trying to write a poem in a coffee shop.

Verse forms are hard and I'd like to prop
rhymes like sets on supports, down the ladder yell,
“Climb the stairs, you'll find me at the top.”

Writing about writing with banks of words to swap
rhymes for rhymes, each terminal word a cell,
trying to write a poem in a coffee shop.

In frustration I'd beat rhymes into submission with a riding crop
—*That's* no ending metaphor on which to dwell.
Climb the stairs, you'll find me at the top,
trying to write a poem in a coffee shop.



“A Journey Through Narnia: Lucy Meets Mr. Tumnus”
by *Drew Wilborn*

The Widow and the Lighthouse

by Victoria Murray

We are taught in literature

the lighthouse is a man,

the sea his woman.

We visited this lighthouse,

my husband, my children, and I;

lighthouse, people below, and bay.

Like the light he was harsh.

He was austere and salt-battered,

the white-hot brightness of his rage blinding.

But the sea can fight back.

She may rage as well,

beat him, wear him down, tear him apart . . .

She will win, sea men know,

and cater to her will.

So this is all a lie.

My husband was no lighthouse.

Just a man, who liked order,

and married me

which he will not admit as mistake.

My words escape me, as though he is ever living.

Is that not so, visiting the place where he died?

No.

Is that not so, the old wife facing the new?

Like all men who go to the sea,

he becomes hers. She loved him, too.

Jealously.

Quickly.

Violently.

And would be satisfied
with no small, dry part of his lungs.

Literature tells us
the lighthouse is a man

(See my husband there?

Salt-battered, austere, blinding?)

And the sea his woman:
Giving for once
as good as she's got.

Tuesday Night, Washington Nationals Game

by Victoria Murray

The people throng,
 unlike devotees to Mecca,
 as this one event will not
 change their lives.

Tuesday night, and the Metro
 was hell, complain the businessmen
 going home to wives or microwaves
 Tuesday night and the Metro
 will be hell afterwards,
 know all the fans.

Tuesday night, and the people throng
 in the streets not yet lit
 from branches one story's height,
 long lost to them
 Narnia for baseball.

Tuesday Night,
 a grand bazaar
 of people accessory
 to the coliseum event to come.

A man with a saxophone plays,
 case emptier than is should be
 for the siren held to his lips—
 reed wet, bell wailing—
 the best music we've heard in our lives.

People in fake jerseys
 hawk merchandise and then run
 back to bosses with cashboxes and wares
 like pushers running back to the cartel.

At the gates and all throughout,
 Guards, police, rent-a-cops, security
 white shirt, yellow vest,

black belt black pants black holster
black radios black shoes black hat—
Chug your Mountain Dew at the door,
high schooler on your senior trip.
There's beer on sale inside
You're not old enough to buy.



“Alaina Surreal”
by Charles Alkire

Good Hair

by *Lindsay Horton*

She got that good hair.

What is good hair you ask?

It ain't the hair of her ancestors,
them deep curls,
tough roots,
multiple colors.

You see, this girl right here
got that hair that ain't never seen a struggle.

No, she got that good hair.

That European hair.

That hair that blows in the breeze and
does what she wants it to do.

That hair you see on magazines making you think
this look can be yours too.

For a small fee.

The hair of a conformed society.

Hair that ain't never bothered to venture outside
the world of relaxers.

This hair don't know what being "natural" means.

Too much product,
like too many outside influences, and few hot combs
have completely changed and damaged this hair.
But as long as it don't put up no type of fight she don't care.
Why?
Cause baby doll this child has good hair.

It's easy to manage,
it ain't nappy,
and it don't resist ponytail twist.

It is perfect.

And she will be damned if *those* “people” and their
need to remind her of their shared roots effects her good hair.

She plans to keep her
European-based,
product-filled,
over-relaxed,
obedient good hair.

Life already ain't fair.
So why must she give up her good hair?

These Seemingly Broken Hands

by Arielle Case

My mother's hands are cracked and dry
from years of paperwork and filing.

From endless nights spent in the cancer ward with my brother
sanitizing them again and again
though they split and bleed in the winter
the sting from the alcohol in her cuts
is enough to distract her from the pain in her heart.

My mother's hands love to create
fudge and brownies and chocolate chip cookies by the dozen.

Holding a lit cigarette,
my mother's hands drift to her lips to ease her stress
I say something rude,
my mother's hands smack me on the back of the head.
My mother's hands hold her small orange lighter
as she sings the Righteous Brothers to me and my brother
(we act embarrassed but end up singing along with her).

My mother's hands lift
paperback novel after paperback novel—
reading them like most people change clothes.

My mother's hands are old yet strong
because they still hold our family together.

Death is Fowl

by *Sarrah Strickland*

Thunk. Feathers pull loose from their falling host.
The wing'd victim, stunned, plummets, now a ghost,
a mahogany blur, creature brought low
by professionally polished windows.

A drying sidewalk compassionately acted as a cushion,
catching the bird graciously in its wet-cement bosom.
The limp crow's face rests on the grainy, cold
slab of pedestrian highway. Weight molds
a charcoal indent marking the spot where,
wilting further into the drying square,
fate lays claim to his cemetery plot.

Bring him flowers, because Nature forgot.

Oblivious hard hats shuffle on by,
burly men unaware a bird will die.

Joking, cursing, smoking, done with their task,
work trucks rumble past, barely audible
to entombed, comatose fowls. Death pulls,
flaky burnt feathers sink deeper in gray
as choirs of mourning doves sing and pray.

Minutes pass, ruffled body disappears
under a gritty sea of limestone tears.

Lifeless shell in concrete mausoleum,
was your fowl life worth it? Was your diem
carped? Heart now stilled, silenced at your core.

Quoth the ornithologist, "Nevermore."

No evidence left of his descent save
Smudged window, loose feathers, and cement grave.



“Owl”
by Monique Gaboriau

Overactive Consciousness

by *Sarrah Strickland*

Fifteen dollars and one sterile
needle on a Friday afternoon will get you
a piercing, a quick jab to the nostril. Not like a baby
seal harpooned by an Eskimo kind of pierced. It was a pinch.

Like that great aunt, with the facial hair and no conception
of personal space, grabbing one of your rosy cheeks
when you're five and squeezing it heartily
between her wrinkled, calloused fingers.
Her skin clings loosely

to her finger bones, hanging off her in folds.
I used to imagine I could wrap presents
with that extra skin. Or that if she stretched
out her hands in a breeze, she'd ride the wind
like a flying squirrel and go soaring off in search
of a hat, goggles, and a brain-damaged talking moose

and start her own television show. Oh, was that offensive?
Well, even brain damaged mooses need love.
Don't be an advocate of moose abuse.
I bet Canadians struggle with that phrase,
I know I do. Personally, I have a hard time with the idea
of "sunburn." Why is my red skin stereotyped? Is it really burnt?

No, the sun wants to give you kisses and make you feel lovely
and warm. My ruby complexion is a shade of "sunkissed."
The sun, overexcited, hormones raging, is new
to kissing. Cut the sun some slack;
it was his first time. Maybe
it's not his fault at all.

My face, embarrassed
by his affection, is still in shock,
trapped in a prolonged blush; every time
I'm around the sun, my face nervously
crimsons without fail.

What Time Took

by Sarrah Strickland

Creases and wrinkles are a topographical map of the terrain, showing how years of laughter, love, and loss have slowly etched indentations into their faces, like an eroding beach weathered by languidly lapping waves creeping closer with the tide.

Time has stolen thickness and vibrancy from hair, once as lush and full as tropical plants in the Amazon, now hanging limp at the base of withered, fragile skulls. Shiny, liver-spotted domes dotted with silver, white, and gray patches of hair were robbed of the brilliant, earthy tones that created rich growth. Age came as a thief, gradually exchanging youthful locks with changelings, poor substitutes of thin, brittle, and inferior strands.

Hands, with knuckles swollen and stretched like waterlogged canvas, grasp dented aluminum on faded gray walkers. No longer lithe and limber, dexterity vanished, replaced with swollen knuckles and bulging joints, dry and cracked landmarks corroded by arthritis and years of manual labor. Remaining skin sags and settles like a prom dress three sizes too big, bunching up to form folds and velvety creases on the bony hands attempting to wear the fleshy material.

Cracks and lines in the molding, even the cornerstone is crumbling as the mind of the elderly clouds and dims like an overused street light. Each passing day, a thin layer of confusion relaxes over weary neurons, like dust settling on neglected furniture or mold lethargically growing inside forgotten Tupperware containers. Blades dull, becoming blunt, metal rusts, and silver tarnishes. Old minds wage war

with forgetfulness. Memories fade, wisdom is lost, and time snatches away recollection. Knowledge bleeds away as the tourniquet time tied gradually slips loose.

Caffeine Excess and Personal Crisis

by Kristi Hixon

Coffee grounds in the top of your trashcan—
do they have a story to tell?

Glow of a blank screen, whir of a fan,
make sick concert of stale Arabica smell.

Do they have a story to tell—
crumpled pages absorbing dregs' blood,
in concert with stale Arabica smell,
stifling ripped words in globs of mud?

Grim-patterned pages absorbing dregs' blood,
steady draw of the blank screen,
stifle ripped phrases beneath roasted mud.
Lifeblood collects as the coffeepot keens.

And the steady draw of the blank screen
blurs conviction of clock's red digits.
Lifeblood pools in the coffeepot's keen;
Tremors spread your body's sporadic fidgets.

Blurred conviction of clock's red digits
must remain so to save your sanity.
Tremors spread in tow with rough fidgets;
to sit in this stasis is vanity.

What remains to save your sanity?
Don't recall torn letters in the trash.
To sit in this stasis is vanity.
You eagerly pray for caffeine crash.

Don't recall torn letters in the trash,

glow of a blank screen, whir of a fan,
but eagerly pray for caffeine crash.
Exploited grounds call from the top of your trashcan.

Nana's House

by Kristi Hixon

Here, you smile, and I can feel all the warmth radiating from you as you hug me.
Your dimly lit hallway beckons to us.
I dance around the furnace as it pops and I watch the orange particles of light and wonder what strange creatures inhabit its dark recesses. You're a bit frantic at the threat the hot grates pose to my toes.

We'll forget the spat and wander toward the old TV with the turn-style controls and buttons that stick from dust and moisture. Fight through the fuzz to find *Shirley Temple*, anachronistic, infused with color that's out of place, but we do not care. Sitting with you on that worn, scratchy sofa is the only way I'll watch black and white.

My stomach grumbles, and you have that sweet, bubbly giggle and start toward the kitchen, asking needlessly what I want: just cold bologna between slices of white bread. Add Pepsi and one redeeming factor—pickled beets. I am too young now to fret over cholesterol and blood pressure, and you spoil me in Mom's workday absence.

I never want to take a bath; I'm cold when it's done, but you faithfully dry me, meticulously rubbing the towel over my dripping skin, leaving white flecks

of towel dust all over me, joking
to stop my irrational tears that try
to come between us. You calm me with canned
Spaghettios, say I must eat every “O.”

Then comes the fateful night when I decide
to place my toe in the mouse trap, a poor
experiment. And for the very first time,
I feel your anger, know I’m imperfect.
No cuddling in your brass-framed bed tonight.
Even your hermit son is startled now,
and Mom is shocked when she returns to find
me crying at your house, hurt toe forgotten.

This begins a rapid fall, no recovery,
after your literal fall down the stairs.
“Just a broken shoulder” precedes seven
years of mini-strokes and memory loss—
an impenetrable fog entraps you.
And the one fall and outburst culminate
in a startling choice to pull a simple plug
in a white room where your tongue well mimics
the Sahara and you cannot swallow
so that I can gasp at your funeral
about bologna and *Shirley Temple*.

Renovating Home

by Kristi Hixon

Hydrant, smiling like the sun,
and ground, veined in canyons
like an overbaked cookie,
forget their symbiotic relationship.

Beyond, tiny towers of pale blue blooms
clump together on a floor of wooden gravel.

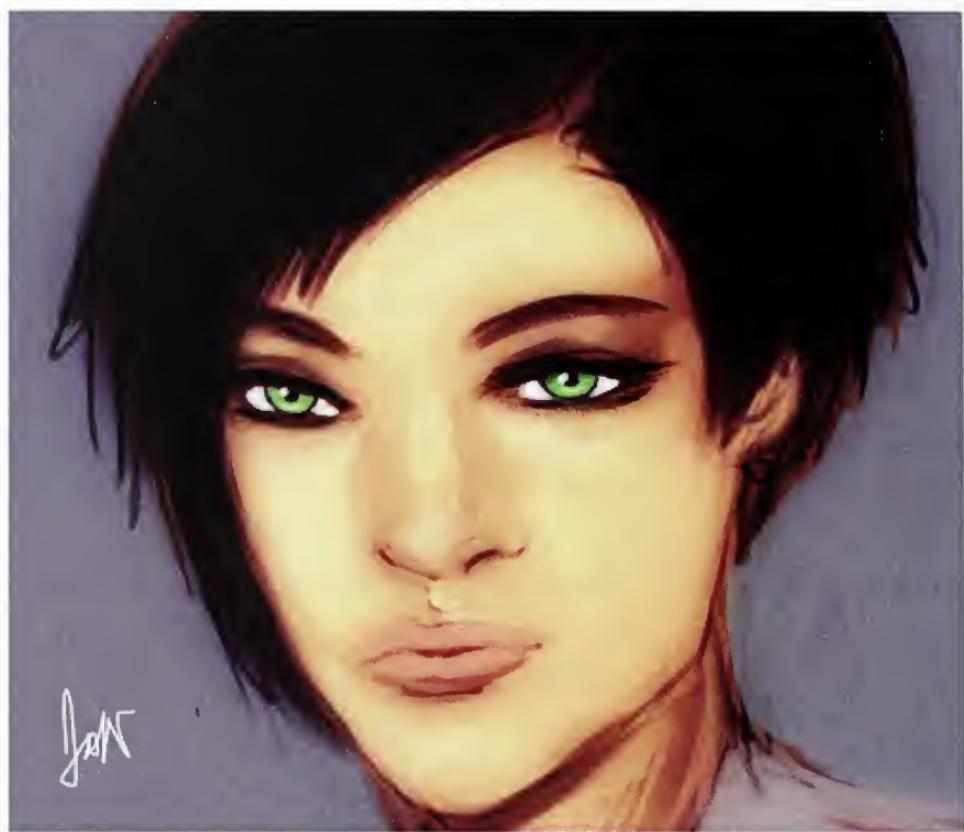
Three flights of stairs in rusted concrete
are lit by concentration of an electric moon.

Trees swathed in flaking red paint guard the cyan pool
that ripples with the weight of unthrown stones.

A robust and regal pole bears no flag—
houses the cotton lure of a spider
while a neighbor sings its spangled duty.

The quilted grass meets a toddler,
naked head sporting sporadic hairs,
with misplaced needle, no thread for a hat.

1-0-9 boasts crystal walls newly polished,
bordered by red brick paths and baby palms,
shares benches outside its arrogant glow,
invites approach but welcomes no guests.



“A Girl”
by Jessica A. Nkwocha

Fire-Fed Flashbacks

by Kristi Hixon

We had the fireplace installed
in preparation for Winter
more than a decade ago,
a few shades darker than pine,
pretty corner piece
dressed in artificial stain.

Not original with the house,
not built in. Doesn't feed on wood
but makes real crackling fire
and manages not to smell like propane.
You were trying to cost efficiently
heat the house, but I was in it
to build community.

I had visions of our family
sitting in cross-legged semi-circle
around caged flames,
silently marveling at the paradox
of a contained fire as we inhaled
hot chocolate and smiled perpetually.

But we sit before it in turns, individually,
seeking solace from the fierce cold
that fights to penetrate glass doors.
Atop its mantle sit staged photos
of us in holiday garb—relics of years past,
wooden snowmen in plaid felt scarves,
candles and college paraphernalia,
and a crayon caricature
by your youngest daughter.
As if it were a shrine to tradition,
we each view it surreptitiously,

independently contemplating
the strange picture it portrays
of a cohesive family in matching clothes.

We do not hang stockings above it
but place them beside the front door.
Tight on space, the Christmas tree
nearly conceals the fire, gives it
the air of feeling forlorn
until I seek out its company again.
You sip cinnamon sprinkled eggnog
alone in the corner of the room
furthest removed from the gracious fire.

Just as our fire resigns to neglect,
you feel the warmth begin to fade
and ask me to give you a hand
loading propane tanks
into your truck—
two miles up the winding road
is the gas station you worked
in high school. Pay the kid in the camo
jacket and baseball cap to fill twenty
gallons and take me inside
to buy Slim Jims and Yoohos
for the family. We do this each time
the fire looks hungry, and I can see
you, more than thirty years ago,
pumping gas in your flannel shirt
and smearing that oily sponge
across clouded windshields
at this old service station
for the same couple who owns it now,
whose grandson sits behind me in Algebra

in khaki pants and a neon Polo
and borrows my super-powered calculator.
This reel that plays across your rearview
amongst leather upholstery is more real
than photos upon the mantle.

And while your wallet takes a dent,
I look forward to the next time
the fire loses power and the house
gets a chill so that I can feel
that wordless connection
the fireplace provides.

Do Not Disturb

by Kristi Hixon

Pastel print on a cream-colored card,
flimsy so that it waves to greet you
when you shake it. When I violate its rule
and cross the threshold, I leave the hall
of red and golden ferns to trample

a pattern of rounded diamonds,
again red and gold upon the tint
of a sickly evergreen. The carpet climbs
the eggshell-spattered wall
like a newly walking child struggling

to conquer the seat of a chair. Curtains,
striped in green, hide me from the world,
or the world from me, somehow leap
from the window, and yet remain,
to conceal the undergarments

of the bed bathed in vertical waves,
set out to drown me, an obsolete
woven rug in a dye that makes me taste blood
lies at the foot. The head tries its hand
at carving the morning sun but uses tools

too blunt in varnish that is quieter
than that of the booming nightstand.
A mirror my height and much wider
reflects this faux home back to me, and I gasp
that I am alone in it.

A palm tree peeks at me
from a brass-girded frame, amid a sky
of white, where it, too, hangs in absence.
The room will be still, and its coolness
will raise goose bumps to last all night.

“Do not disturb” echoes in my mind
like the image of the costly shoes
advertised in a magazine that only I
don’t read. I snigger faintly to interrupt
my grimace. Please disturb, someone, for I

have no place to be and cannot sit
in this silence poignant as a death knell,
looking around at all the furniture
in the stinging smell of bleach that suggests
this is not home.

Fiction



“Curiosity Kills—Steampunk Butterfly” *by Meaghan Thompson*

Occam's Razor and the Disposal of Dangerous Books by Victoria Murray

Mrs. Occam's Fundamentals of the Disposal of Dangerous Literature class was the first day Camilla held a razor to a book.

Before that class, she'd never been able to come close to whole books, not really. Of course there were the book burnings—there were always the book burnings, which were always more exciting for the children and adults than for those over the reading age of thirteen and the elderly. She'd stood in line for the mildewed piles of those books, or done daily duty as the holder of the class instructions in school, turning from pressed aluminum plate to pressed aluminum plate along with the daily lessons while the teacher lectured and light reflected off the garish lacquer.

The first book she ever held—nine years old, in line for the bonfire, reaching ahead to grab her book too soon because the two children in front of her had reached ahead and grabbed too soon—had been big, thick, ugly with its faded red cover, thin fabric worn away at the corners, grungy gold lettering barely flecks in the fibers. Great-Grandma had talked about books, old and senile and stupid, talking about Shake-spear, who was apparently a bard and a prince and wrote a lot in rhymes and made up stories. It always made her wonder how someone so weak and useless could get a name like Shake-spear—maybe shaking the spear was all he could do? Maybe he failed in school and was forever known for shaking spears and useless words afterwards?

That book had been surprisingly light. She was able to get away with opening it because it was so big—it'd burn better that way. Small printed marks were all in side, fitting into their rectangles like always. Nothing like the shapes memorized in the lessons. Just boxes and boxes of old writing, making a big old box of ink inside a box of paper inside three walls of hard old fabric.

And into the fire it went, with a whoosh of relief and sparks. Her arms hadn't been strong, and a book didn't fly well

open. But still, the big ugly thing was with the others, burning, providing light and festivity for everyone, doing a proper job for once while she wiped its dusty remains from her ugly old red coat.

Book burnings got duller. When she learned to read, the books were less big ugly boxes of confusion and trouble—they were frustrating, interesting, terrible boxes of boring things that were difficult. But there, in the faces of the elderly, where it wasn't supposed to be, was something more. She would later learn the word was "remorse." They were "aggrieved." Deep within, some felt "morose." And "morose" was related to "remorse," but there wasn't anyone to tell her why or how because that language was older, rarer, better hidden.

Thinking of poor stupid Great-Gran and her senile stories of stories, Camilla wanted to know the why to books. She already knew what everyone knew—books were dangerous, history said so. That is why most were illegal, and only the very best were allowed to be printed and kept in the offices of local government to be read during service hours when the Keeper was in, three alternating days a week. Why they were allowed to learn to read only when they would be able to understand instead of thinking dangerously.

But no one can just ask "why" about books, she knew that. And the more she knew why she couldn't, the more she wanted to know why books? Were all the words the same in all of them? Why did not all the letters look exactly the same? Why was writing not allowed for anyone but the most tested and qualified—those who hated writing the most?

The easiest way to get to books then was to qualify for Disposal. To handle books, to learn about them, to judge between them. And if the people who traded in pages were truthful, then it wasn't that hard to take pages away.

Day one of Mrs. Occam's class, she told her students to select tools from the back of the room.

Among the elbows jostling for supplies—a jar of inflammable liquid, motorized shredders, hand-crank shredders,

kindling sets—a small pack of razors called out to Camilla. She took them, and held them close to her chest.

Mrs. Occam saw it.

Mrs. Occam saw everything.

And Mrs. Occam pointed to her, saying Show us what that tool can do.

So she did. Camilla took a book, forcing the choice to be arbitrary. It was paper covered, pages spongy and fanned and yellow with age. She looked down instead of in anyone's face, saying First you sever the pages from the binding, then even if anything escapes elimination, dangerous meaning cannot go far. Anyone of reading age will know enough not to be swayed by one dangerous page, once all the others are scattered.

Mrs. Occam never stopped staring.

That day she taught the basics of disposal—flame being the king, but the flaw of that being to burn too many or improperly does not leave the book engulfed, and dangerous words remain—and worse, remain together. Razors left potential open to smugglers and page-lovers. Motorized and hand-operated shredders required maintenance and had limitations of strength, fuel.

Camilla tried to be aware of herself, to not give any indication of being a page-lover, or that she was trying to hide being a page-lover. Mrs. Occam's stare went to all, lingered on all, accused all.

There was of course one option. That option was to become the best, to be brutal, to recognize not all books could be saved and some days none could be saved, nothing, not one jot not one tittle.

But she had found her way. The way of the razor. The way of discernment in disposal.

The final day Occam took her away, taught her the word "Library" and with a smile gave her a hand written diploma—"calligraphy" she called the letters on it—and a new set, giving her a title to match her directness, Occam's Razor.

The Gilmore Award, annually presented to the best work of creative writing accepted for publication in Sefer, is awarded this year to Victoria Murray for her piece “Occam’s Razor and the Disposal of Dangerous Books.”

This year’s Gilmore Creative Writing Award contest was judged by Elena Passarello.

Elena writes, “I selected it for its display of linguistic control, its command of internal monologue, and the swiftness with which the story creates a new world. I admire how quickly we readers can picture this anti-literary dystopia, and even more so how quickly we can live in the mind of its main character. When young Camilla extrapolates how a writer called “Shake-spear” got his name, or yearns “to know the why of books,” we’re right there with her.”



“Ray Charles”
by Charles Alkire

Cloudpocalypse 2014—February Storm of the Month

by Victoria Murray

Gathering rolls of girth like an anxious bridesmaid, Tuesday storm clouds bore down on a small Midwestern city just settling in for a good panic.

The unseasonable February heat¹ had brought women of varying stages of (lacked) youth out in bright spring dresses to boutique districts, outdoor cafés, and picturesque park picnics. That same humid warmth bred a storm which had them then moving snapshots of a floral-printed Marilyn Monroe flash-mob, clutching skirts with faces halfway between coy flirtation and constipation.

Straw narrow-brimmed fedoras tumbled through the wind to oblivion and all would later agree, “No big loss.”

Those in skyscrapers ran from their places of work in fear of the rattling windows turning to windows exploding inward² while others ran to the building lobbies with gratitude that the windows were all that was rattling.

The storm itself started by raining hypoallergenic guinea pigs, followed by raining nervous-bladdered Shi-Tzus. The populace agreed that the refuse made and impact upon the rotary impellor when the storm began raining feral Norwegian forest cats, with their Viking leanings toward pillaging and their constitutions for much more difficult ecosystems than the domesticated Midwest.

¹ Fact checkers on the scene found that the February heat could indeed not be seasoned, their findings consistent in attempts with salt, pepper, Italian seasoning, and several blends of dry-rub and meat tenderizer. Any seasoning they could get their hands on, really

Sub-note: The paper would like to issue an official apology to any citizens caught in the crossfire of wind and flying seasonings. Our only excuse is our dedication to the craft of journalism.

² Many of those working in architecture, construction, and humane building disposal were noted as tweeting and facebooking angrily that the term everyone was looking for was “implosion.”

There were a number among the populace very put out by the lack of corresponding fanatical religious prediction of this particular “-pocalypse,” and have since tweeted the newspaper’s official twitter account in protest of dubbing this storm

“Cloudpocalypse 2014.” More on this as it develops.³

Due to budget cuts in the paper resulting in fewer pages being printed—which for some reasons mean our web article pages are being consolidated, the paper will now recognize some editorials:

“You’ll all be sorry,” writes Billy-Bob Rainer of Billy-Bob and Jilly-Bob’s Basement Construction, a proud sponsor of this paper. “We done tol’ you, you live in the Midwest, you needs you a good, sturdy basement. You read that book *The Book Thief*? That book done made me cry. Anyway, that little girl survived them bombings because why? Because she had a basement, that’s why. You want to end up like them Nazis, all blown to bits because you didn’t have no basement? We done tol’ you, we build you a basement, fair price for fair labor, and we don’t care. We break through your bottom floor whether you in a trailer or one o’ them fancy steel-reinforced concrete buildin’s, we don’ care. That book. That book done made me cry.”

And again, that was Billy-Bob Rainer of Billy-Bob and Jilly-Bob’s Basement Construction.

Our meteorologist had this to say about the storm:

“It’s really concerning, all those clouds, and how dark they are, and the shape and everything—there’s nothing good about this at all. But like I was saying, the roster for cleaning the microwave has been in the break room for months,

³We do not actually intend to report on this group’s involvement ever again. This is a report after the fact, not a series of live updates. We only said that so that they would be satisfied that they had been recognized, and would perhaps keep buying our papers or visiting our website in order to scour future articles of mention to their group.

Sub-note: It is the professional opinion of our management—meaning that one cranky editor who outsources all proofreading to struggling graduate students—that this group does not read footnotes. At this time we would like to say that this is his opinion alone, and will issue a “just to be safe” apology to the group in question for any offense this footnote or article may have incurred.

so everyone has a fair burden for keeping a shared space clean, and I'm *still* the only one who cleans that thing! I mean seriously, it's a sanitary issue! And a courtesy issue! How hard is it to just, you know, wipe off your own grease and cheese, and *whatever* else after you make whatever it is you're making? It's *just* unsanitary."

The mayor could not be reached for comment, and the chief of police replied to our tweet asking after the mayor's disappearance that indeed the five-month investigation into the mayor's disappearance was still ongoing.

In the end, the storm passed with minimal damage, perhaps in search of a more convenient location to wreak its inevitable destruction, gathering up its rolls like it was embarrassed of them and heading to a more forgiving section of the party. Our correspondent stationed in Sunny Smiles Trailer Development could only be reached on the newspaper-provided satellite-phone, his only words before hanging up being "We're ready for this one," in the voice of a man who's been to war and did not return the same as he left. We look forward to his appearance and any promotion he can offer for the paper in the episode of "Storm Fighters" which will appear in five months time.

In closing: Ad space available within the body copy of all articles. Also, the paper is looking to hire more writers, though considering we have no budget to pay more writers, goodness only knows what compensation will be offered since seniority dictates writers such as *this one* are due for a raise.

Nonfiction



“A Porch”
by Christopher McLeod

The Dying Would Walk in Circles

by Rachelle Rae

I grew up hearing over and over again the same few stories about her. She died young—those three words end every tale. She possessed a French beauty that the family says I inherited. Although the three black and white photographs that hang on our living room wall make me wonder about the latter, the former remains forever set in stone in a New York cemetery. Beneath that stone lies the first Rachelle, the great-grandmother I never knew, the one who lost the fight with tuberculosis.

I thought of her last summer, but not while in that New York cemetery. Instead, I sat in a bus ambling down a Costa Rican mountain road. I stared down at a building that sprawled across half the valley. Crumbling golden stone refused to gleam in a futile protest to the sunless day. Square gaps in the stone resembled a checkerboard and echoed of long-gone windows. I leaned past the friend beside me as we jolted over the road paved decades ago, my eyes straining for a better look out the window—my first glimpse of the sanatorium.

For years, I dreamed of going on my first mission trip, of exercising daring, of leaving home and tacking *brave* onto my identity. I never dreamed of going to a sanatorium. Yet that afternoon forever linked the two experiences because after spending a week in a small village, my mission team packed up our bus, journeyed halfway down the mountain, and parked in that valley. We needed to travel two more hours to arrive at the capital city, but we decided to stop anyway. Surely we could find some fun in the abandoned edifice turned tourist attraction. Surely.

I expected it to smell. I know that hospital scent, and I expected it to greet me when I climbed down from the bus. To my surprise, the century in which the sanatorium has remained closed has treated it well—only the scent of rain that descended from the clouds hung in the air.

We discovered the doctor's house first. I zipped up my sweater as we approached the smaller building tucked beside the main one. Plopped at the foot of the mountain that kept back the sunrise and sped up the sunset, the three-story residence of the doctor who founded the sanatorium boasted one immediate draw: an exterior staircase of twisted black metal that appeared to lead to the roof. Three of us ventured to climb it. Three of us retraced our steps when we realized it led nowhere. I followed the others into the yawning doorway, but the plain walls and empty window casings failed to interest me. I wanted to see the roof.

Finally, I found the crumbling staircase that led me there. A gray sky stood as backdrop for the majesty of the mountain, as green and lush as July demands. Although the sanatorium's valley boasted no trees, from the doctor's roof, I saw towering trunks burdened with emerald branches. What a beautiful view for such an ugly place marked by death. What did the doctor believe when he founded this place—that the hope he could offer would outweigh the morbid statistics? Did he ever wonder if he would die there, too?

I failed to notice all my American friends leaving. Finally, the Costa Rican pastor who travelled with us called out to me in slow Spanish so I could understand—"Senorita, senorita"—and I broke free from my reverie. I spun, pouring the thought I couldn't voice past our language divide into my smile. "Isn't it glorious?"

By the answering grin he gave me, he got the message.

I laughed off the worried looks of the others when we rejoined the group just in time to follow the waving tour guide into the sanatorium. Immediately, I rued my empty sweater pockets. I had no pen or paper with which to capture the thoughts arcing across my mind. For a nineteenth-century building, it loomed expansive on the inside, open, airy. Three of us could fit shoulder-to-shoulder in the long hallway, though I eliminated that option because I held back, too busy observing to measure the width or even the distance of the hall.

My friends kept a better eye on me; when my sneakers snuck too close to the edge of the winding stairway that lacked banisters, the man at my side yanked me to safety with a warning look. I just grinned at him.

As we passed room after room, the fictional potential I had sought to assign to the nebulous doctor cemented into something more solid. These rooms were not just rooms, these once were places where patients, *people*, coughed and wheezed and weakened. My fingers reached out to rotted-away doorframes. Someone once grasped this wood to steady themselves. I leaned my face over the planks of a room I wasn't to enter lest I fall through the rotten wood. Someone once walked on that forbidden floor.

A writer could spend days in such a place. A writer whose great-grandmother came to Ellis Island from France in 1911, married an Irish steelworker, raised two boys to toddlerhood, succumbed to tuberculosis, and never knew her inkhearted namesake could spend *years* in such a place. I studied each scrap of yellow wallpaper left behind by the patients and each streak of graffiti left by less-respectful visitors—all of it rang with secrets and stories lost in time. I only half-listened to the translations our team leader gave of the tour guide's speeches. I cared little for what he could tell me of the history of the place. I wanted to know the history of the *people*, but still they felt fictional, nebulous.

While we walked, the clouds parted. In the center of the sanatorium, the hallway broke in half to reveal, open to the sunlight, a round slab of stone with a faded design in the middle. Sunshine wafted over us as I heard the translation of what the tour guide said then. "The dying would walk in circles. Right here. For hours."

I shuffled out and stayed to the side. In fact, no one ventured into the center of the circle. I squinted in the sun to see the tour guide's face, to confirm he told the truth. His bearded frown bore an honest sadness. The tuberculosis patients who came here, he said, the ones still well enough to leave their beds, would

come out to this open space where the sun shone down on their white gowns and pale faces. And they would walk in circles.

I could see them. Faces lifted to the sunlight that the mountain tried to block out, thin clothing clinging to emaciated forms, shaky breathing becoming a chorus. They came from all over the world to get well in this place where the air supposedly imbues weak lungs with strength. Some did—some came, got well, went home, lived lives. But many more—many, many more—came, got worse, never left, died.

I noticed a difference in the long walk down the hall in the second half of the sanatorium. The wallpaper, the graffiti, the holes in the floor looked much the same, but the potential that piqued the storyteller in me on the doctor's balcony hardened into a longing for a time machine. Whereas at first, I marveled at what I could make up, now I wanted to travel back in time and gather the stories scattered in the rain-tinged air of this place like so many scraps of wallpaper on the wind. The fiction no longer outshone the devastatingly *real*.

They walked in circles in the only place they could feel the sunlight. They must have known that the walk stretched out in front of them, futile, in vain. No amount of walking could get them out, but they didn't care. They walked anyway. They kept walking even though footprint after footprint only took them around the same old circle. Even on the threshold of death. There seems something so very *human* about clinging to the last vestiges of life, about straggling into a sunlit circle.

To leave, to step from the sanatorium into the courtyard, we had to duck down steep stairs and traverse a dark tunnel. I refused to go until someone turned around and took my hand. Cowardly, I know. I wonder, what kind of courage must the first Rachelle have possessed, as she watched herself waste away before either of her boys turned five, as she prepared herself to say goodbye? I caved to cowardice when it came to getting out of the sanatorium through a dark tunnel. *They* clung to courage when it came to never getting

out and facing the darkness we all must face.

Maybe, I thought, *brave* is not so much leaving home for the unknown. Maybe *brave* is realizing that we must—and our reaction after we realize that truth.

I want to die walking, too.

Never Truly Returning

by Becca Tutton

It all started several years ago when I was about nine years old. We had decided to go on a family vacation: my mother and father, brother and I; my grandparents; my Uncle Shawn and his wife Detra and their one year old daughter, Maya. We had rented an island off of the coast of Maine near a little town called Bremen (pronounced Bree-men). I was so excited. Just image it! A whole island just for us! My imagination was running wild with the very thought of it. So we made the twelve hour car trip up with our various cars and passengers and luggage—we had quite a lot. My brother and I sat in the back of our Mountaineer playing various Gameboy SP games and passing the time, probably listening to a book on C.D. We got there around four in the afternoon because we had to take a boat to the island and well that would be awful at night. Daddy had gotten his boating license online for this reason, and we put the first load of us into the boat and made our way to the island.

Oar Island. It was all I could have ever dreamed of. It had two houses, the main cottage and the cabin. It had a moving dock to work with the tides that had various slopes depending on where the tide was. Colorful lobster buoys were abundant and everywhere. My eleven-year-old brother, Derek, and I helped carry what we could to the main cottage, and then explored the house. It was a decent size and not as unique as one would think, but it was perfect. It had already been decided that I would stay in the loft of the cabin with my grandparents, while everyone else would stay in the other house. The two houses weren't very far apart, connected with a trail that also ran around the whole island. My first thought was to go exploring, which was limited to just the front area while everything was being moved around.

It was just so amazing to have the entire ocean right in front of me, and the Maine coast is unlike beaches and other parts

of the East Coast. It is rocky and covered in kelp and seaweed, full of brightly colored lobster pots and lobster boats that seem to always be going somewhere and doing work, sailboats as well as motor boats sailing past. Unpacking soon commenced, and I set up my American girl doll, Becky, and her tent by my own bed in the loft. The cabin had one bedroom, with a queen bed and two bunk beds in it. It had a small kitchen area, a small bathroom and a small table. Above the main room was a loft, complete with sloped ceilings that you had to duck your head under and climb a ladder to reach. Two small mattresses were on the floor, and the walls were lines with various books. I chose my mattress and was in paradise.

Mornings were always beautiful. With the fog rolling in and the sun rising, the boats could be heard as well as lobstermen shouting at each other and the mechanisms working their magic. My grandparents and I would walk over to the main house, where we would eat breakfast and drink coffee. I remember the first time we rode over to the island. I was sitting in the front of the boat, staring into the blue-green water—the prettiest color I have and ever will see. I remember the feeling of flying, that life was amazing, and that it all had a surreal aspect to it. Nothing will ever match that moment or any of those moments sitting at that front with my arms out, head back, or with my fingertips touching the water, staring into the depths of the water, searching, always searching for magic beneath the surface.

I say all of this thinking back on Maine. I have gone every year since that first year, several other family vacations, doing wonderful things and seeing various things. We stayed on the island again, but it wasn't the same when I was thirteen as it was when I was nine. Maine represents my childhood. It represents a family that for a brief moment was one. We didn't have the distractions of jobs or video games or school. It was just us, and the salty air of the ocean bringing us together. It was as perfect as anything could ever be. Maine, to me, is the only place in the world where I have these memories of pure perfection. Maine is

everything that is my childhood. I had all my hopes and dreams there; it helped me to dream far beyond what Front Royal (my hometown) could ever allow. It helped give me the creativity and imagination to write. Maine. The very name makes me smile no matter how much I hurt. Maine. The place I am always trying to recapture and return too. Maine. The only place that will never be normal or ordinary. Maine. My lifeblood, my childhood, my heaven on Earth. Maine. It is everything that I can never return too, yet always hope that I can. Maine. The place I often dwell on and long to be. Maine. It is so much more than a state or a place; it is a feeling that can never be reclaimed much like the childhood that was spent there.

Love is a Pain in the Neck

by Victoria Murray

When the prompt for the February reading was announced as “What is uncomfortable about love,” I had some misgivings about my qualifications to write because for a while now I have been one of those sickening “happily involved” people, with a mutually loving, supportive, and low stress relationship and everything.

[Shrug of “I’ve got no excuse.”]

Like many privileged, self-aware writers, I had to look at my situation and recognize the lack of conflict, angst, and suffering from which to produce worthwhile art.

But art, or narcissism, or whatever each of us is here for today, must prevail.

So I attempted to look at this problem in the same manner I attempt to look at my significant other. I looked up and up

and craned my neck and up some more, and I have reason to believe there’s a face up there, and finally I glimpse the underside of a chin.

Just at this point some less-well-designed vertebrates would have found their own bodies betraying them for such physical efforts, the stressed upper vertebrae severing the taut spinal cord, rendering this foolish creature paralyzed, gazing upward. . . and by now my neck hurts.

And I realize, with all the comfort one may lavish upon a non-problem, a “nonblem” if you will, this is how my love is uncomfortable: the physical size difference between a small woman and a reasonably large, very tall man.

“Your problems are not problems!” a voice of legitimacy cries out.

Well, um, chyeah? But it’s still, like, effort when you’re standing on tiptoes to try to kiss somebody’s cheek, sometimes giving a sort of little ridiculous jump at the end more akin to a child’s last desperate bid for a cookie jar he is too short for the counter to allow into his grasp. . . than. . . any other analogy where

being short is not directly called out as the issue. . .

Ahem.

My problems may not be problems, oh detractor in the audience—I know who you are—but I am still afflicted, listeners, with efforts thwarted for a height difference which leaves me looking ridiculous, “adorable~!” in the manner we condescendingly critique children’s failed ventures.

When I see a mirror of my situation play out in public, a tall boy walking escort to a tiny girl, dwarfing her by the length of his stride, his stature head and shoulders above hers, I have the same reaction:

[Points and laughs, trailing off into an “Oh. . .” of realization, hanging head.]

This is what I give you, to satisfy the prompt of “ways that love is uncomfortable, based on a sizeable height difference:

1. If this is your biggest problem (even if you are skewing the perspective for the sake of comedy), shut up and let the other writers talk.
2. Accept that you will look hilarious and the laughter of others is justified. (And many holy books say so is retribution.)
3. Your spinal cord hasn’t severed yet! (Unless it has, in which case I am so sorry for the insensitivity of this essay.)
4. . . . And for what pain may be in your neck, your partner may be developing tall-person back troubles anyway.

And, most of all—

5. Standing on top of things evens the playing field, or at least feels like it does.

Eyes of the Night

by Julia Shillinglaw

Darkness hung around me wrapping me in the fears of the night. Eerie noises from unseen creatures haunted the blackened trails as they darted through the underbrush. Shadows of overhanging trees took the form of evil beasts when my flashlight beam bounced off them. I crept along as silently as possible, my boots clumping up with globs of mud as I walked. I kept telling myself there was nothing to be scared of, but tonight my body seemed to think otherwise. My heart rate felt like it was accelerating as my hands clasped more tightly to my rifle strap. My mind kept going back to the things I had heard about this place at night. I had been told by different hunters that bears had been sighted in the area. Others told me that they had seen coyotes the size of big German shepherd dogs. This I could accept with little doubt. I had witnessed their presence the season previous when I had been sitting in the tree stand with my older brother.

We had gone to one of our big stands near the river one cold November afternoon and had sat there for hours never seeing one animal. When night finally came, we prepared to leave, wondering why the deer had been so elusive. I was getting ready to climb down when I first heard it. It sounded like a dog yapping. Assuming it was just someone's hunting dog, I continued making my way down the ladder when suddenly the whole earth erupted with the ominous howling of coyotes. Stunned, I turned toward my brother, who appeared just as startled as I did. He motioned for me to go on down quietly. After he too had reached the ground, he had me hold the light as we went along so he could be ready with the rifle just in case we encountered the coyotes. Both of us were alarmed and watchful that night as we made our way out of the woods. We had never heard so many in one area at a time and stayed close to each other until we finally made it back to the truck. But that was last year, and now my brother was not here, nor was

he anywhere close. For so long walking alone in the dark from my stand had not bothered me. Even my first night out by myself, I had felt no worry or fear, but tonight something was strangely different.

I kept going trying to ignore the vines that were hanging overhead like hands reaching down to grasp me. I heard leaves rustle to my right. My heart jumped, and I almost tripped trying to back away too quickly. A small animal fluttered and then flew away. It was just a bird. I felt disgusted with myself and flickered the light ahead of me on the trail. What I saw stopped me dead in my tracks.

“Oh no . . .” I was shakily muttering to myself now perhaps for some sort of comfort, but it brought none. What is that? My light had caught more than shadows tonight. Before me, two gleamingly bright eyes peered at me from a distance. Immediately, the gun swung off of my shoulder. My wet fingers felt like icicles the instant they met the metal barrel. It was too far away for me to discern what kind of creature it was, and knowing not to shoot what I couldn’t see, I waited for him to get closer. But I had a problem. I was carrying a 270 Browning semi-automatic rifle, not the ideal gun for close range. Considering this, I yelled at him, hoping a human voice would spook him into stopping. My voice came out shaky, and the animal wasn’t fooled. He advanced closer, not deterred in the slightest by my command. I could see him coming, could detect the pattern of his movement but not determine what type in order to associate it with the right animal.

I fingered the safety and clicked it off, holding my ground. He was getting closer, his stride not slackening as he moved towards me deliberately. Balancing the flashlight in one hand, I held the rifle freehanded in the other, holding my breath trying to keep the gun steady. Now he was almost close enough for me to see him. I was ready, but not sure I would be willing to pull the trigger at such a short distance. Then I saw more movement, but this time it had a familiarity that made my grip on the gun start to slacken. My flashlight beam outlined his body before me. At that instant, my heart quit pounding, and my body stopped trembling profusely.

I let my inhaled breath finally leave my lungs as the gun sank from my slumping shoulders.

With relief, I moved forward and stretched out my hands to wrap around warm, white ears. It was a dog-a purely white hunting dog with his ribs about to burst through its skin. I was never so happy to see him in all my life. I sank down beside him, horrified at the thought that I could have killed him by accident. He licked my hand and up my arm appreciatively as I stroked him. His tongue felt dry and glided over my skin like fish scales. A cool wind came and dried the sweat from my face while the dog's fur soaked it from my hands. The woods were quiet for a moment or so it seemed. It no longer held ghosts and creatures that wanted to devour me and seemed still and beautiful in the little streak of moonlight bouncing off the trees. I sat there for a few minutes enjoying the serenity before slowly getting up knowing I had to meet my dad at the head of the road. I rubbed the dog's ears affectionately and whispered goodbye to him as I started walking. His eyes followed me, and then he, in turn, ran after me. He stayed close to my side all the way to the road never leaving me. I was strangely and wonderfully safe and unafraid of the darkness that did not appear as foreboding now. We walked along, the both us, content in each other's presence. Frogs were chirping gleefully while leaves rustled slightly in the breeze, and all the noises of the night now seemed to be in harmony.

I was zapped out of this enchanted world when I saw headlights flickering through the trees making their way towards me. It was my dad coming to get me. His old, rattling truck worked its way down the bumpy trail, and soon his headlights blinded our way. I waved and he slowed to a stop. "Whered' you get the dog?" he asked rolling down the window but not getting out of the truck. I quickly told him the story sparing him a few details. All the while, he listened interestedly, but when I finished he motioned for me to get in the truck.

"But. . .what about him, can we take him out with us? He's

so hungry."

My dad looked at me knowingly, and I gave him my best pathetic look, but it didn't work. "No. . .we can't. He's somebody else's dog, Grace. Look on the collar and tell me if you see a name," he said while shifting his truck into neutral.

In one quick movement, I was squatting down beside the dog trying to check his collar, but I must have frightened him. He crouched at first and then rolled over in a submissive, defenseless position as if he thought I was trying to hurt him. In pity, I rubbed his soft, white fur while talking gently to him. As I made the upturn stroke, my fingers went deftly underneath his collar and worked it around to where the name tag would have been. Although I found a tag, it did not have a name imprinted on it, just a number which I called out to my Dad as he dialed. I sat waiting while my Dad listened to the phone. Finally, he hung up. "Sorry, Grace, nobody answered." My face must have fell because he added, "Don't worry about him; he'll be fine. He's got a tracking collar on. His owner will be here soon to pick him up. We'd better hurry up though. Mom's got supper waitin' on us." Reluctantly, I gave the dog's ears one last rub and told him goodbye again. He watched me as I climbed into the truck and stayed within our headlights for a short time, all the while staring at us as we left. My heart ached to see him sitting there so lonesome, and I could only hope his owners would come soon to pick him up. The next day I came back to go hunting, and he was gone, but that night I walked from my stand alone in the dark, assured and unafraid, almost as if he was still there beside me.



“A Great Art Teacher”
by Monique Gaboriau

Love You, Mr. Bobby

by Julia Shillinglaw

A cool breeze chilled my skin as it swirled carelessly about me. Leaves rustled slightly and floated aimlessly out of the nearby trees. The smell of fall was prevalent in the September air. With a sigh, I leaned my back against the rough bark of the pine tree that hovered over me. In my lap lay an unfinished letter—a letter addressed to a man that I had known for all six years of my life. He was a good friend of my parents, but I also considered him a friend of mine. He was always nice to me, and I really liked it when he would come over to visit, yet now I was having problems thinking of something to say to him. He had recently been diagnosed with cancer, some sort of dreadful disease that had turned his face worried and pale and stolen away his youthfulness. I did not know much about cancer, but what I saw was enough to convince me that this was hurting my friend more than anything else could.

Thus, I was sitting here today laboring over a sheet of paper that held my best drawing on one side and “Dear Mr. Bobby” on the other. This was as far as I had gotten. I wanted to say something that would make him feel good again, to cheer him up, but my first grade vocabulary was very limited, and this drawback prevented me from writing what I really wanted to say. In frustration, I had been sitting here for what seemed like hours pressing my small hands against my freckled face trying to rack my brain for something to say. I only knew a few sentences that I thought appropriate to write to someone who had such a horrible disease.

With sudden resolve, I wrote down, “I hope you feel better soon. I will be praying for you. I love you” and finished the letter. Although the letter was a little lacking compared to something an adult would write, I meant what I said, and I figured that was more important than writing a lot of fancy words. With that finishing touch, I slowly walked back to the house somewhat satisfied. As

my fingers encircled the cold metal doorknob of my front door, I stopped before turning it and reread the letter. Even I could tell that it was not great, but I had hopes that it would encourage him. Little did I know how much those last three words would mean to him.

About a year later, we moved to a small town several miles away. Because of this, we rarely visited back with our friends and lost contact with them for a while. Almost ten years passed when we received news that there had been a death in their family, and so we decided to pay them a visit to comfort them. When we did, we were reunited with my friend and his family. As I looked at him again for the first time in many years, he did not look like the man that I remembered. The tolls of cancer had taken even more away from him. Almost all of his hair was gone except for a few colorless strands, and he was so weak that his son had to help him get in and out of his automobile.

Looking deep into his gentle brown eyes, someone could see pain but even more peace. The reason for this peace had been explained to us previously by some of his family members. They told us that not long after my family and I had left, he had gotten closer to God and given the rest of his life to Jesus Christ. After he had done this, his whole life had changed. He had become a person who loved his family, served God faithfully, and was a good witness to those around him. His uncomplaining, loving attitude despite the condition of his dying body was an inspiration to those who witnessed his suffering. To those who were not Christians, he was that shining light that others dream about being, but are not capable because they are not willing to give away their hold on this world. He had not just changed physically all these years, but he had also changed spiritually and for the better of all those who knew him.

That day my parents and I talked with him. We reminisced over old times—hunting trips he had taken with my dad, ATV rides that he had given to me when I was younger, along with

other things, but I am sad to say that much of that part of the conversation I do not even remember. On the other hand, there is one thing that he said to me that day that will remain in my heart forever.

He was getting ready to leave. His son had come to help him to the car. After he said goodbye to a few others, he turned to me, his tired but caring eyes looking tenderly into mine. He told me with all sincerity, "Thank you for writing me that letter. I still have it today. You will never know how much that meant to me." With that, he turned around and feebly walked away, his son supporting him, and leaving my heart with the warmest feeling that it had had in a long time. He had kept it all these years! Something I, an ignorant little first grader, had written for him.

Now as I look back in time, I think of Mr. Bobby who has gone to be with Jesus several years ago. I remember the way he touched my life and many others. I had supposedly done something for him, but he has done so much more for me. He has shown me what is most important in this life by refusing to let cancer make him bitter and dim His light for Christ. In addition, it makes me happy to think that I have made an effect on someone else's life by just these few simple words, "I love you."

Contributors

Elena Passarello, this year's judge for the Gilmore Creative Writing Award, is a writer and performer originally from Charleston, SC. Her book *Let Me Clear My Throat*, a collection of essays on the voice in pop culture, received the gold medal for nonfiction at the 2013 Independent Publisher Book Awards and is a finalist for the 2014 Oregon Book Award. Her essays have appeared in *Oxford American*, *Slate*, *Iowa Review*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *Normal School*, and the music writing anthology *Pop When the World Falls Apart*. Elena teaches creative writing at Oregon State University and in the low-residency MFA program at Murray State University.

Charles Alkire is a Senior, Graphic Design major who lives in Hanahan, SC with his wife and 5 kids. After graduation he would like to work for one of the major design or ad agencies here in the Charleston area.

Arielle Case is a senior majoring in English Education at Charleston Southern University.

Logan Crowder is a native to South Carolina. Currently, he is a sophomore working towards an English Major and History Minor. His plan is to become a rock star. When that inevitably doesn't pan out, he plans on falling back on his education. He writes poetry and listens to Nirvana. People tell him that he's good at both.

Monique Gaboriau is a junior Graphic Designer at Charleston Southern University. She focuses most of her time on developing her artistic skills. Her future goal is to become an art teacher or work for a magazine company. She has several other pieces of

artwork in the 2012 and 2013 *Sefer* literary magazine.

Autumn Dimple Marie Hanna was not born, she was unleashed. She is a freshman at Charleston Southern earning her degree Criminal Justice degree (with an emphasis in vigilante crime fighting). After she graduates, she plans to devour the soul of every book she can get into her hands and hopes to get her writings published. Writing means commitment, so does insanity. Coincidence?

Kristi Hixon is a senior at CSU majoring in English and Psychology. She is from Blythewood, South Carolina. After she graduates, Kristi plans to pursue a Master's of Arts in English at Clemson University beginning in Fall 2014.

Born and raised in Charleston, SC, **Lindsay Horton** is a senior at Charleston Southern. She is an English major with a minor in Christian Studies. After graduation, she plans on spending a semester traveling through various countries in Europe before attending graduate school to pursue a degree in journalism.

Originally from Louisville, KY, **Jeanie Herold** moved to Charleston, SC in May 2013. She's a freshman at Charleston Southern and is currently earning her degree in Graphic Design. After she graduates, she plans on working as a web designer.

Christopher Alyn McLeod was born on November 30, 1992 in Sumter, South Carolina. His family includes his mother Kimberly, father Kenneth, and older sister Melissa. He graduated in 2011 from Sumter High School and was accepted to Charleston Southern University into their Graphic design program.

Victoria Murray is a junior English Education major looking forward to graduating in May of 2015. She grew up in various

states as an Air Force brat and has been published in last year's *Sefer* with two pieces of prose with very long titles.

Jessica Nkwocha is a Nigerian-American from N. Charleston, SC. She's a Graphic Design Major who will graduate from CSU in 2014. She has a passion for Illustration and reading Gothic fiction, and she plans on doing freelance work in Illustration art and writing books for YA and adults in the future.

A swamp-and-salt-water-raised South Carolinian, **Rachelle Rea** will earn her Communications degree in May of this year. She will continue to grow her editing business after she graduates. Her essay, "What the Medals Mean," was published in last year's *Sefer*. Read more of her work at www.RachelleRea.com.

Julia Shillinglaw is from Saint Stephens, South Carolina. She is currently a sophomore at Charleston Southern majoring in Communications with a minor in Business. This is her first time submitting anything to the *Sefer* magazine.

From Lugoff, SC, **Sarrah Strickland** is a senior at Charleston Southern and will graduate in May with a BA in English. After graduation, she plans on taking a year off to travel, write, and discover what she wants to do with her life. She had a piece of prose and a handful of humorous haikus published in the last year's *Sefer*.

Meaghan Thompson is a Graphic Design major at Charleston Southern University.

Binh Tran is of Vietnamese descent and is a local to Charleston, SC. Currently, he is a freshman at Charleston Southern with an undeclared major, but he's leaning towards Science. After he graduates, he wants to go in to the Peace Corps.

Becca Tutton is currently a junior, and is working towards a degree in English. She is originally from a rural town in northern Virginia, and hopes to become a published author and travel the world as a journalist after graduation.

From Spartanburg, SC, **Drew Wilborn** is a super awesome senior at Charleston Southern University. He enjoys photography, painting, and graphic design works, which are all things that he hopes to pursue after he graduates.

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